

2025
THE NOVI MAGAZINE
VOL 1



NOVI

Live Love



Somewhere, right now, a child is running for her life instead of running to school.

I used to think the world's big problems needed big people with big speeches and big budgets. I was wrong. Take a peek into history books, and what do you find? Time after time, it's the small, quiet people. The ones nobody interviewed on TV. The ones who didn't even know they had it in them. They're the ones who tipped the scales.

Which is maybe why I think Novi has a shot. We are small. Minuscule. We couldn't rent a fancy office if our lives depended on it. Our marketing department? That would be me and a cup of coffee. But we have heart. We have grit. We hold this almost absurd belief that when people really care, things begin to change. And we have friends who support us, which, by the way, is more powerful than most people realize.

The Right Side of History

We want to be on the right side of history. The side that shows up for the oppressed, the terrified, the people running for their lives with whatever they can carry. (Spoiler: it's usually not much.) Right now, millions are fleeing. Not because they want to. Because they were born on the wrong piece of dirt.

I can't stop thinking about the kids. The ones who might have cured cancer or invented some gadget that brings clean water to every village—if only they'd gotten to grow up in peace. If only they'd gone to school instead of hiding from bombs. That's why we exist. To give a few of them a shot at the life bottled up inside them.

And by the way, the magazine you're holding? It's full of stories of these unlikely world-changers. Not just our team, but the supporters, the people we've met, the ones

who've worked alongside us. The ordinary folks who keep saying "yes".

The Yes People

Here's something wild: after World War II, researchers learned that the people who hid Jews in their homes, risking everything, weren't the bravest, richest, the ones with the biggest houses, or the most heroic. They were the ones who got asked. That's it. Someone knocked on their door, and they said "yes".

It makes me think maybe the world doesn't need superheroes. Maybe it just needs more people willing to ask. And willing to say yes. Not yes to saving the whole world by Tuesday. Just yes to caring. Yes to one small thing. Yes to starting somewhere.

Becoming

Because it's not really about who you are right now. It's about who you turn into when you keep saying yes. You don't do good things because you're already a good person. You become a good person because you do good things.

And honestly, today seems as good a day as any to begin.



Oddny Gumaer
Founder, Novi





Photo: A Yazedi child. Oddny Gumaer



This is the first magazine in the history of Novi. We hope you like it.

There's a lot of heartbreak in the world right now. But thanks to people like you, and to some of the everyday heroes you'll meet in these pages, good things are happening too.

Novi's vision: *Restoring childhoods disrupted by war.*

The Novi Community is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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PO Box 3673
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This magazine is a true community effort. You'll find the names of our contributors throughout the pages. Unless otherwise noted, the photos were taken by Novi staff, often with our phones, in the middle of the work we love.

Design and layout by Oddny Gumaer, with a few wise design tips from her daughter, Elise Gumaer. If you'd like to be part of this work, we'd be thrilled. You can donate online or send a check to the address above.

And please, tell us what you think. We treasure your encouragement, and we learn from your constructive criticism.

Thank you for being part of the Novi story.

Front cover photo: Eir Jørgen Bue

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Together, we acted

Because of you, children caught in war found safety, belonging, and care in 2024.

"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed." Psalm 82:3–4

This verse defines our work. And yours.

In 2024, the war in Myanmar deepened. Villages were emptied by airstrikes. Families fled with nothing. Children were left without protection or comfort.

Together, we acted. You helped train counselors, deliver emergency relief, and provide thousands of children with professional trauma support.

In Ukraine, your generosity brought nutritious food to children, sent them to summer camps, helped them with their education, and strengthened a growing network of youth peacebuilding clubs. In Iraq, you stood with families still living in the long shadow of war. Each act of care mattered. Each response said that love is unstoppable.

This report tells the story of what we are building together together, a community that lives the words of Psalm 82 by defending, upholding, rescuing, and restoring. We restore childhoods disrupted by war.

Because of you, children in war zones are not only surviving. They are healing.

Steve Gumaer

Steve Gumaer

CEO
The Novi Community



THIS YEAR, YOU CAN GIVE THEM A CARE PACKAGE FOR CHRISTMAS.

What's so special about Christmas?

Yes, it's Jesus' birthday. At least that's what we say. But somewhere along the way, it became a season of frantic shopping, overstuffed dinners, and obsessing over whether our homes look as perfect as the neighbour's. We spend time and money on people who already have more than enough, and still feel exhausted when it's over.

But there is a way to make Christmas truly special. Extraordinary, even. By shifting our gaze from ourselves to those who have almost nothing. This year, you can give something life-changing, perhaps even life-saving: a food parcel for a Ukrainian family. For just 20 USD, you can place hope on someone's table.

Don't worry. You can still bake your cookies, sip your mulled wine, and light the candles. But imagine knowing that somewhere, across the world, a family is giving thanks because you remembered them.

Find out how to give on page 38-39.

#LiveLove



Photo: Eir Jørgen Bue



Novi in Shariya

Novi supports a local charity in Shariya, Kurdistan. The organization is run by Yazidi locals. Their focus is to help families who still live in poverty and who are traumatized because of ISIS' actions. They have professional social workers and psychologists who support the children in the area. Our desire is to get involved in the local schools as well.



Photos, clockwise from the top: Children at their school graduation. Yazidi mom with her child. Happy Yazidi boy in Sharya. A girl who is dressed for a party celebrating spring. Jon Peerbolt and Oddny Gumaer with one of the teachers at the best school in Sharya. All photos: Novi.

The best school in Shariya

by Jon Peerbolt

By day three in northern Iraq, the landscape begins to repeat. Tent camps, half-built homes, and roads baking in the sun. On the way to the school, you start to recognize the rebar poking out of the same crumbling balconies.

The school is large. In the courtyard, clusters of uniformed children chase each other through the sand. Inside, ten teachers gather in a room to tell us what we already suspect: the classrooms are overcrowded and underfunded. There are 640 students and only 9 paid teachers. Seven more volunteer their time without a paycheck.

In the next room, a government representative overseeing education in the region sits behind an ornate wooden desk adorned with gold pens and national flags. The meeting ends before it begins, and she stands to leave. Our translator, Shahab, offers his hand. She declines. "Thank you for coming. You are welcome," she says, then disappears down the hallway.

Showing up

The principal stays. He tells us about the broken air conditioners, the broken solar panel that used to power the lights, the classrooms that go dark in winter. Still, he calls this the best school in Shariya, and parents are proud that their kids attend school

here. You wonder, If this is the best, what does the worst one look like?

But over the next hour, you see what he means. Teachers, some paid, some not, cramming 60 students into sweltering rooms and teaching anyway. Showing up every day not for a paycheck, but for the kids. They believe in the work. That belief fills the cracked walls with something like hope.

As we leave, we're invited to the end-of-year certificate ceremony. It's the last day before summer break. The children swarm around the camera, eager to be seen, captured, remembered. That's when you get a real sense of what 640-to-17 actually means, a sea of joyful chaos with a handful of adults doing their best to guide it.

God forgive me

On the way home, Shahab turns to you. "Did you notice she wouldn't shake our hands?" He doesn't sound angry; he just sounds tired. "She's Muslim. They see Yazidis as unbeliev-

ers and often refuse to drink our tea or eat our food. Some even whisper 'God forgive me' before interacting with us." He continues. "In Mosul, some schools have 17 teachers and 24 students. They're well-maintained. The government listens to their needs."

Showing up

You stare out the window as the tent camps roll past again. The realization settles in: that woman, the one who refused even basic gestures of human respect, is the representative tasked with advocating for this community. She's the one federal Iraq asks about what the schools in Shariya need.

You didn't fix the school. You didn't replace the solar panel or fund the salaries. The broken system remains. But the people inside it, the teachers, the principal, the volunteers, keep showing up. Teaching in the heat. Organizing children. Hoping the next generation has more options than they did. For now, that hope is holding everything together.

The gift of



*Photos, clockwise from top:
A boy drinks the water he just got from the well. Another boy pumps water from the well in the camp. Buckets of water in somebody's residence.
All photos: Novi*

Did you know this?

- Globally, about 1 in 4 people still lack access to safely managed drinking water.
- Where there is no access to water, children (often girls) spend many hours fetching water from distant sources. That reduces time for schooling, studying, chores, rest.
- A significant fraction of under-5 child deaths are due to preventable diseases related to unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene.
- Time spent collecting water, illness days, and lack of safe water in schools worsen educational outcomes.



water

Water – Life’s most essential miracle

We turn on a tap, fill a glass, and drink without a second thought. Water is so readily available to us that we rarely see it as a privilege. But in many parts of the world, clean water is a luxury. Children miss school because they spend their days fetching water. They get sick because the water they drink is contaminated, and epidemics spread because the lack of water makes it impossible to maintain basic hygiene.

For the refugees on the Myanmar–Thailand border, water is not just a need. It is the very foundation of life.

When the support disappeared

For many years, USAID support ensured that the camps could purchase diesel for the pumps that supplied water to tens of thousands of people. But when the Trump administration cut all funding for such projects, the pumps fell silent. No diesel meant no water supply.

For those who had already lost everything, this was a catastrophe.

Novi and our partners who said yes

When the call for help came, Novi acted quickly. Together with our partners at The Kind Human Foundation, we found a solution that not only addressed the crisis but also made the camp more sustainable. We funded and installed solar panels that could power the pumps without relying on expensive and unstable diesel.

This summer, the water began to flow again. Now, nearly 40,000 refugees can access clean, safe water every single day.

More than just water

This was not only about quenching thirst. It was about children being able to attend school. About preventing disease. About giving people living in exile a little more dignity—and hope.

LETTER TO GOD

Sometimes, the most profound cries for peace are not made by world leaders or famous writers, but by children. Today, I want to share with you a letter written by a 10-year-old boy in Ukraine — a letter he wrote to God. The boy who wrote this attended the Novi Community essay competition last winter. Like hundreds of other children, he sat down and wrote his thoughts about the war. His was the only one addressed to God.

I want to write a letter to God.
Can I? I'm not sure...
Maybe it doesn't matter. I'll write it anyway, as best I can.

And I'll ask just one question:
When will the war end?
If this is our punishment, then is it the children's fault?

Maybe I didn't listen to my mother.
Maybe I didn't learn my lessons properly.
Once, I broke a table lamp.
Is this the reason for our troubles?
Is this why we lost our childhood?
Our families?
Our homes and our gardens?

We have been hiding in shelters for years.
I have long atoned for my guilt:
I study well,
I take care of my mother,
And I promise — I will repair the broken lamp, or buy a new one!

Forgive us, God. Have mercy on us.
But please — stop this bloody war!
Because to be honest, it's no longer enough to lose every day.
STOP THE WAR!!!

Mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and teachers
read letters like these every day.
But they do not reach You, God.
Otherwise, You would have ended this terrible war.
You would have stopped the evil that has been killing soldiers
— and their children — for years.

Then our mothers would not cry through sleepless nights,
With the loud air raid alarms,
With rockets and planes flying overhead.

Still, we do not lose faith.
And so we write... we write... letters to God.

-Kovalev, Oster, Ukraine, 10 years old



Photo: Eir Jørgen Bue



Photo: Eir Jørgen Bue

to risk all



Madi Kerrigan and
Oddny Gumaer with
the participants of
the training

Nine Women, One Fight for Hope

In partnership with Norwegian People's Aid, Novi recently brought together nine women from different Burmese aid and activist groups. All of them live in exile in Thailand, forced to flee Myanmar's brutal military regime. They are women who once stood up to tyranny—and paid a heavy price for their courage. Yet even in exile, they refuse to give up. From their displacement, they continue to organize relief efforts and support networks for activists and civilians back home.

We spent a day with these women. What binds them together, beyond their fight for democracy and human rights, is a shared passion for children. “We need simple, practical tools to help children regulate their emotions and begin to heal,” said the director of NPA, when we discussed how we could help. So that became our mission for the

day. We talked about childhood trauma, about the scars left by violence and neglect—and about ways to help children reclaim a sense of safety and hope. The women learned practical, hands-on exercises they could carry into their work: creating Helping Hands portraits, blowing soap bubbles as a tool for calm and play, practicing breathing techniques, and role-playing scenarios where some became children and others stepped into the role of caring adults.

By the time the day came to an end, we had nine new friends. And those nine women left with something even more powerful: concrete tools they can use to bring healing and hope to children living under one of the world's most merciless dictatorships.

Oddny Gumaer

Pastor Robert and a recognition that humbled us



30 years ago with one of the first Karen children we helped



Pastor Robert with Oddny Gumaer

We have worked with people from Myanmar for 30 years. Many have recognized our contribution, among them are the leaders of the Karen Refugee Committee.

Pastor Robert, loved by so many, called me while I was in Mae Sot meeting with Burmese and ethnic dissidents and human rights defenders. "I have something I want to give you," he said.

For over fifty years, Pastor Robert has stood unwaveringly beside his people. He has documented abuses, written reports, advocated for the needs of the Karen, and built bridges between them, aid organizations, politicians, and diplomats. He has been a leader you could depend on, a man who

never abandoned his people. When he calls and asks to meet, you set everything else aside.

We arrived at his modest home on a rainy morning. As always, Robert wore a Karen *longyi*. On the table sat a bowl of bright, freshly picked fruit from his garden. After a few warm pleasantries, he said:

"I wanted you to come because I want to thank you. For thirty years, you have stood with the Karen people. Whenever new needs have arisen, I've always known I could call you. Through your

actions, you've shown that you are with us."

Then, he brought out a gift bag containing a framed certificate of appreciation from his organization, the Karen Refugee Committee.

For us, this gesture meant more than words can say. To be thanked by those we have long wished to serve carries a weight no formal honor can match. Pastor Robert's recognition confirmed that our work had mattered—that, in some small way, we had made a difference in their lives.



Do you have a dollar?

“Why do you want a dollar?” I asked. He shrugged. “I’ve never seen one. Just curious.”

by Preston Button

I was sitting on the steps outside the mess hall at a summer camp in southwestern Ukraine, letting the sun do its thing and not thinking about much. This camp, run by Novi, was a safe zone for a hundred kids from the front lines—a place where the soundtrack was laughter instead of explosions.

† Danik, ten years old and sharp-eyed, plopped down next to me. He’s from Kherson, a city that spent a year under Russian occupation and now gets shelled so often the locals measure time by the blasts. I’ve been there. You hear a boom at least every five minutes, sometimes muffled, sometimes not. Danik lives there with his brothers. He remembers when I came by, cooked shashlik, and played football with them. That was enough for him—he decided we were friends for life.

This time, he had a question. “Do you have a dollar?” I’ve been in Ukraine long enough that any dollars I brought have turned into *hryvnias* and vanished. I told him, sorry, no dollars. He looked a little let down, but it didn’t last. I handed him enough money for two ice creams, and when he returned we sat there, melting cones in hand.

“Why do you want a dollar?” I asked.
He shrugged. “I’ve never seen one. Just curious.”

A few minutes later, another American volunteer strolled by. I asked if she had a dollar. She dug into her wallet and pulled out a crumpled bill. We handed it to Danik, and he stared at it like it was gold. When I told him he could keep it, his face lit up—he looked like he’d just won the lottery. Soon, his brothers and their friends showed up. Danik flashed his dollar. They passed it around, inspecting it like scientists, then handed it back. He tucked it into his phone case, careful as a banker.

For the rest of camp, Danik showed off his dollar to anyone who’d look. It was his treasure. Later, I heard he kept showing it off back home in Kherson. For him, that dollar was worth more than anything money could buy.

That dollar wasn’t just a souvenir. For Danik, it was a ticket to something bigger—a reminder that the world doesn’t end at the city limits of Kherson or the blast radius of a shell. It was proof that someone out there, somewhere, cared enough to give a kid a piece of another world.

But here’s the thing: a single dollar can only do so much. It’s a spark, not a fire. Imagine what happens when we pool our resources. What if we could give Danik more than just a keepsake? What if we gave him books, safe shelter, a shot at a future where the sound of explosions is replaced by laughter and the crack of a football?

Now zoom out. What if Kherson wasn’t just a city you hear about on the news, but a place where kids grow up dreaming bigger than their circumstances? What if a hundred kids like Danik weren’t just surviving, but thriving? What if Ukraine itself became a place where hope isn’t rationed out one dollar at a time, but floods in by the thousands?

That’s the power we hold. Real change starts small—a crumpled bill, a shared ice cream, a moment of connection. But if we act together, those small acts add up. They can rebuild lives, reshape cities, and, if we push hard enough, tip the scales for an entire country.

So here’s your chance:

Don’t just read about Danik. Be the reason he—and kids like him—have something to show off, something to believe in. Give what you can.

Let’s see how far we can take this. Let’s see if we can change the world, one dollar at a time.



Children at the Novi summer camp.



Enjoying nature, peace and new friends.



Why Aid Cuts Are a Gift to Extremists

by Oddny Gumaer

The boy I met in Iraq was eight years old. He never knew his father, who was killed before he was born, yet he carries that legacy every day.

He is ashamed. He looks down. His whole body speaks before he does: "I know I'm unlovable. Because of my father, I'm terrible too. Nobody likes me. Not even my mother. She says her life would have been better without me."

His father was an ISIS fighter. Perhaps a monster. His mother called him brutal, and in front of her son, she said it was a burden to raise the children of a hated man.

But no one chooses their parents. The boy didn't choose his father. He was simply born.

You filthy creature

Now he lives with his brother and mother in one of Mosul's poorest neighborhoods. No one will hire her. She's an "ISIS widow." The boys can't play outside. "Filthy creatures," "sons of a terrorist." They are bullied, threatened, and locked in. Each day, the mother cracks walnuts for three dollars, hoping it will be enough to survive.

The boy dreams of eating until he's full, of sitting in a classroom without fear, of belonging.

So what if one day a kind man offers food, safety, and school? The mother

might hesitate. But then she looks at her hungry sons, always excluded, always unwanted.

What would they really have to lose?

But what if this man is recruiting for a rebranded ISIS? What if boys like him, who've never belonged anywhere, find their only sense of family in extremism? What if the boy who never looked up becomes the next generation's terrorist—not because he hates, but because no one loved him enough to give him a better choice? It's not unlikely.

I've met many children like him. Born into trauma, growing up in war and poverty.

In Ukraine, a ten-year-old showed me a drawing of how to kill a Russian. In Myanmar, Rohingya children watched their parents being hacked to death, villages being burned to the ground.

In Palestine, children have seen families buried under rubble.

In Iraq, I've met women raped by ISIS fighters, left to raise children who bear the stigma of their fathers' crimes.

How can they act without being driven by fear and revenge? Maybe they can't. Unless we help them.

And yet, politicians insist that we'll be safer by shutting people out as if barbed wire can keep the world's suffering away.

Where do terror groups come from?

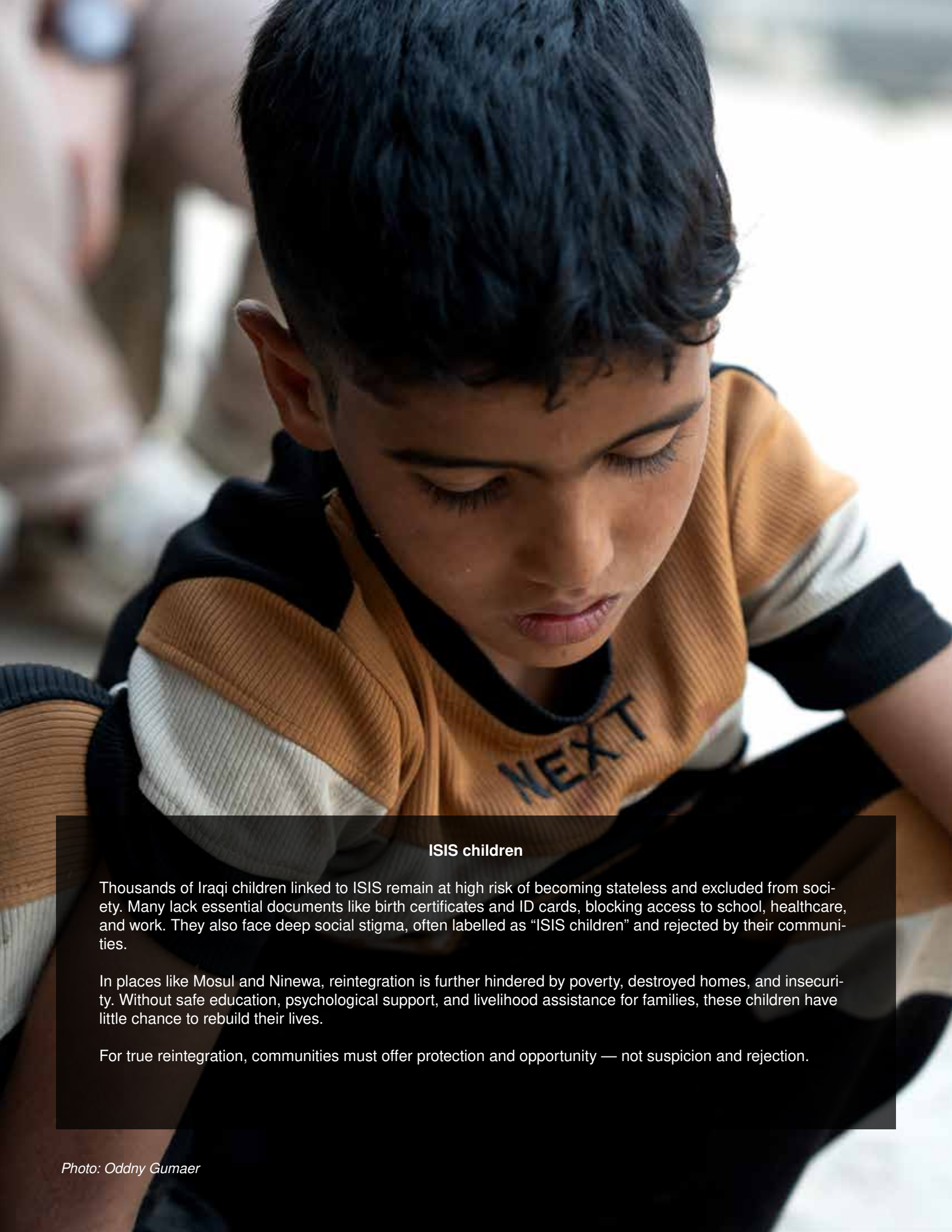
But terror groups rise from ruins. From places stripped of dignity and hope. Many ISIS fighters were soldiers in Saddam Hussein's defeated army. Palestinians join armed groups after watching their families being killed. Osama bin Laden called 9/11 revenge for America's support of Israel.

Oppression breeds violence. Always.

If we don't invest in schools, in work, in dignity, extremists will. They'll give boys like him the only thing they've ever wanted: belonging.

And one day, he may take revenge far from home.

Unless we reach him first.



ISIS children

Thousands of Iraqi children linked to ISIS remain at high risk of becoming stateless and excluded from society. Many lack essential documents like birth certificates and ID cards, blocking access to school, healthcare, and work. They also face deep social stigma, often labelled as “ISIS children” and rejected by their communities.

In places like Mosul and Ninewa, reintegration is further hindered by poverty, destroyed homes, and insecurity. Without safe education, psychological support, and livelihood assistance for families, these children have little chance to rebuild their lives.

For true reintegration, communities must offer protection and opportunity — not suspicion and rejection.



The world is our workspace

The world is our workspace. Unfortunately, it's also a world where far too many children are growing up surrounded by the sound of gunfire instead of laughter. Right now, the number of children whose lives are shaped by war and conflict is staggering.

We can't just watch and do nothing. When the world's leaders put power and politics before the safety, well-being, and future of their own children, and the children of other nations, we have a choice. We can shake our heads and scroll on. Or we can act.

At Novi, we choose to act.

We know we cannot change the entire world. We know we cannot help everyone. But we do know this: doing nothing is not an option.

Last year, a team of just eight people, yes, eight, worked with partners on the ground to deliver what we can only describe as a miracle. Together, we impacted 76,156 people with love. With hope. With the message that their lives matter.

That's the power of refusing to give in to despair. It's the power of believing that small things done with great love can ripple outward in ways we may never fully see.

Never underestimate what can happen when ordinary people give everything they have for love, for justice, for what is right.

This is what we mean when we say: **WE LIVE LOVE.**

NOVI EVERY WHERE



Most of Novi's projects are in **Ukraine**. Here we help support food distribution, build playgrounds, do resilience training, work with youth, send children to summer camps, work with mentally challenged children, support centers where children can go to do school work in areas where their schools have been bombed or closed for other reasons.



Mexico



On the border between **Mexico** and the USA, Novi joined First Presbyterian Church, Midland, TX and worked with migrants who were trying to get entry to the US. We heard heart-breaking stories of poverty, oppression and very dangerous journeys to what they hoped would be a better life. Among other activities, our team did a Helping Hands training with the children and their parents.

Ukraine

Iraq

Bangladesh

Myanmar



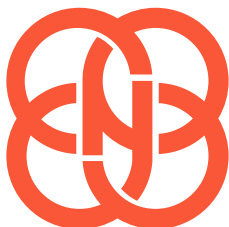
In **Northern Iraq** (Kurdistan), Novi works with a local charity to provide help and support for Yazidi families who were victims of the Yazidi genocide perpetrated by ISIS.



We were asked to help some of our Rohingya friends build a water well in one of the crowded refugee camps in **Bangladesh**. We also help the same group with school supplies and clothes for the children.



We gave trauma and mental health training for children in **Myanmar**. We also gave emergency relief for earthquake victims, and for villagers who experienced a famine due to the army's attacks and failed crops.



20
24
here
is how
you
made
your
mark

FOOD
WATER
SHELTER



41,600

1,015



NOVI
SETS

HELPING
HANDS



623

480



YOUNG
PEACE
BUILDERS

SUMMER
CAMPS



480

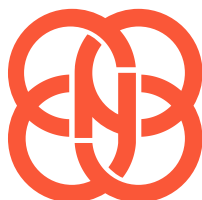
For children living on the frontlines of war in Ukraine, every day is a fight for survival. The burden of this stress on young hearts and minds is impossible to quantify. That is why we host summer camps. For one week, children experience: uninterrupted sleep, laughter and play, lots of food, the chance to form new friendships. It is a week of peace amid chaos—an opportunity to simply be children again.

Young Peacebuilders (YPC) gives young people in war-affected areas the opportunity to be positive agents of change in their communities. What makes YPC unique is that the young people themselves lead the program, with support from adult mentors. This gives them the chance to make important decisions, learn leadership, and develop key skills. Novi supports YPC clubs in ten cities in Ukraine.



Helping Hands is a play-based group activity designed to support children in war-affected areas by building emotional awareness and learning healthier ways to manage their feelings.

In all the places Novi works, the biggest needs we face are food, water, and shelter. In 2024, we helped distribute food in remote areas of Ukraine and to poor villages in Myanmar. Novi also supported the survivors of the terrible earthquake in Myanmar. We also helped build solar-powered water pumps in Mae La refugee camp.



The NoviSet-program was developed to give children living under extreme stress, such as in situations of war and violence, tools and skills to regulate stress through play and exercises. The program consists of a backpack with toys and an instruction manual that guides the child through over 400 trauma-informed activities.





From Seeds to Impact

Novi's Journey

Beginning in May 2022, after nearly three decades of work serving children and families in war zones through Partners Relief & Development, Novi was formed with a compelling vision to restore childhoods disrupted by war. Because children are the most important thing in the world, their protection and well-being became our measure of success. What Novi lacked in resources, it carried in fortitude and a growing community. In a world unraveling with conflict, Novi set out to build something that could endure, grounded in care and conviction.

Because of your generosity, more children in war zones received the care they needed to heal, survive, and to begin coping with their trauma.

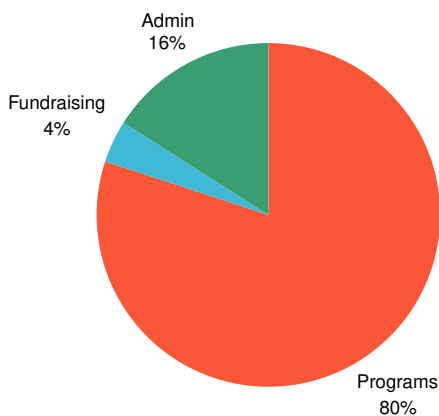
In 2024, your compassion reached 76,156 lives, including 40,000 children and their families, through \$787,488 in gifts that turned generosity into provision, nourishment, and healing for those surviving war.

This growth has been nothing short of extraordinary, born of sleepless nights, relentless dedication, and a small team carrying an enormous mission. Yet the real strength of our story is you, our faithful community of supporters, encouragers, and volunteers whose belief that love is stronger than war makes every act of care possible.

You are the reason children are healing.
You are the reason families are rebuilding.
You are the reason hope still rises from the ruins.

The Novi Community's financial statements were audited by Darin Guthrie, CPA. Based on the audit, Novi's financials present fairly, in all material respects, the organization's financial position, results of operations, and cash flows for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2024, in accordance with U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

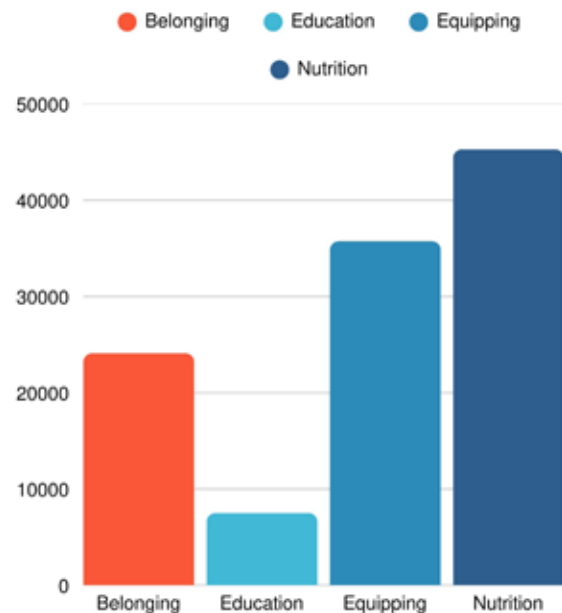
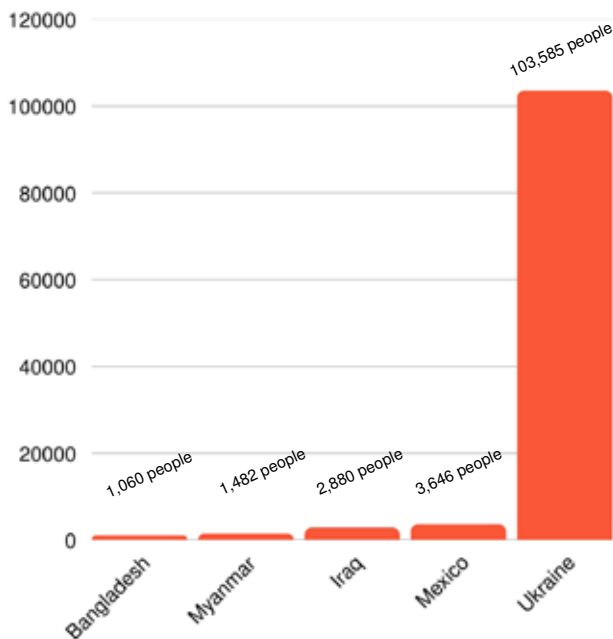
This is how we helped



In 2024, we took some big steps forward. For the first time since starting Novi, we were able to work inside Myanmar, reaching 426 people whose lives were deeply affected by conflict. In Iraq, our faithful partners continued walking alongside 320 Yazidi families, some of the most vulnerable people we know.

We were also grateful to support 1,060 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, living in some of the world's most difficult conditions. And on the border between Mexico and the U.S., 46 people fleeing violence and poverty received care and hope through our work.

Most of our efforts focused on providing food and water, because in times of crisis, those are the needs that matter most. But we're equally proud of the ways we helped build community, offered education, and equipped adults who care for children. Each of these efforts is part of living out what we believe: love in action changes lives.



the other calls

From Burma to Ukraine: Encounters That Changed My Tomorrow



Photo: Rohingya children. Oddny Gumaer



Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote, “The very relationship with the Other is the relationship with the future.”

Over this past summer, my thoughts frequently returned to Levinas and his philosophy of the “Other.” The Other is the fundamentally unique individual who is different from oneself. When the Other is encountered, one experiences an ethical call, a responsibility, to respond to their vulnerability and alterity. While we are all “Others” to one another, I’ve never experienced this ethical call so profoundly as I did this summer.

Meetings in Thailand

I first had the privilege of traveling to Thailand with Oddny. On one particular occasion, we met with a Burmese woman who had left her home for a safer, better life. She was the sole provider for her family. In addition to paying expenses for her husband and two kids, she used the remainder of her small income to support her extended family and fund the education of young girls from Myanmar. Despite coming from unimaginable hardship, this is a woman who became a source of hope in a world that had given her every reason to turn inward.

A second group with whom we met was amongst those who protested the 2021 military coup. As doctors, lawyers, and government administrators, they chose to stand against injustice, knowing the risks. These were men and women with job security and a high income. They chose to protest—a sacrifice they made on principle—and are now actively hunted by their government. In addition, they carry the weight of the trauma: the sound of gunfire as their fellow protesters were shot, and the haunting images of them falling. These are brilliant individuals who chose, even in the face of danger, to do what is right.

The second part of my travels took me to Ukraine to volunteer at the Novi-sponsored summer youth camp. There, I met kids who are victims of a war they didn’t choose. While at camp, my team and I led an “English club.” It was located close to the camp zipline. The kids were divided into groups, and the first time a group went across the zipline while another was at an English club, the kids flinched in visible fear at the sound of the zipline – to them it closely resembled the sound of airfare and buzzing drones. Wow. I never heard that when I rode a zipline as a kid. These kids, whose homes are all in territories experiencing intense Russian bombing, are carrying burdens far beyond their years.

After each of those experiences, I still find myself speechless at the unfathomable generosity, bravery, and courage. From the Karen of Burma to the children of Ukraine, I could not possibly understand their suffering. However, I could not look away from it either—I felt a deep, unshakable responsibility to bear witness, to listen, and to act in response to their courage, pain, and enduring humanity.

I’ve since returned home, and the question I keep asking is what now? I cannot return to the life I once lived because I am not the person I once was. If I choose to ignore the Other that beckons for help, then I do so cognizantly. The question thus becomes—how? How can I help? What can I do?

Hope is not a luxury

For me, I found part of the answer to this question through the many encounters with these people. I began to understand that hope is not a luxury for them—it is a form of survival. When the alternative is despair, hope becomes the strength to en-

sure, to speak out, and to keep going despite overwhelming hardship. When there are governments, systems, and structures that seemingly render a person or peoples powerless, hope is the individual choice, the weapon, that declares otherwise. This goes without saying: If they have chosen to hope—to act—in the face of oppression, pain, and suffering, then so am I.

That said, the relationship with the Other is our relationship with the future. One of the most beautiful aspects of Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophy is the notion that we do not understand the Other. If we did, they would no longer be other. A future of peace is thus not dependent on simply understanding one another. Rather, the future is dependent on our relationships with one another.

I feel powerless to alleviate their pain and suffering. I cannot change the government that persecutes its own people, or broker peace between warring nations, but I can choose to stand in solidarity with the brave Karen people and resilient Ukrainian children.

Learning to paint

In many ways I am a painter whose canvas is blank. I do not know whether to choose red, yellow, or blue; oil pastels or acrylic; abstract or realistic. I do not know what I shall paint ... or even how to paint ... yet I am compelled to try to illustrate that the future is our choice and our design. Relationships are a choice we get to make. They are our most powerful means of choosing a different future, of writing a global story of peace, justice, and dignity. We choose how we treat one another.

Madi Kerrigan is currently studying political science in San Diego. She worked as an intern with Novi last summer.



In a cold, crowded bomb shelter, the children stare at the paper scattered across the floor. Visitors are rare here. Visitors who come to play? Almost unheard of.

Sasha, the group leader, grins. "Today," he says, "we're going to draw ourselves."

hands

The kids blink. Draw... themselves?

When he explains they'll trace their entire bodies—life-size—the mood shifts. Suddenly, the room buzzes with excitement. Pairs form. Outlines appear on paper. Giggles fill the air as friends draw around each other, turning shadows into shapes. Some children draw what they see in the mirror. Others create superheroes with muscles and capes, dream versions of themselves they wish were real.

Feelings on Paper

When the portraits are nearly done, Sasha gives the next instruction: "Now, let's talk about feelings."

Four words go up on the board: happy, sad, angry, scared. Then comes the surprise question: "Where in your body do you feel these?"

The children pause, thinking. "My stomach," says one. "My throat," says another. Soon arrows appear on their paper bodies—pointing to bellies, heads, hearts—labelled SCARED, ANGRY, SAD, HAPPY.

Helping Hands, created by Norwegian psychologist Trygve Børve, helps children name emotions, notice where they live in the body, and learn to talk about them—a small lifeline in the chaos of war.

What Helps—and Who

Next question: "What helps when you feel this way?"

Hands shoot up.
"Petting my dog."
"Listening to music."
"Being with friends."

On green paper hands, each child writes what comforts them. Soon, portraits bloom with reminders: draw, pray, talk, walk, hug the dog.

Then, red hearts appear—names of people who help: Mom, Grandma, best friend, teacher. Some portraits are full of hearts. One boy writes none. "I'm all alone," he whispers. For the adults, it's a moment that can't be ignored.

Pictures of Strength

At last, the portraits are complete. Children hold them high, proud and smiling.

The drawings won't stop the war. They won't erase fear. But they give something powerful: a way to see themselves, to name feelings, to remember what helps when the world feels too heavy.

And sometimes, that's where healing begins.



Photo: Duke Caldwell





NoviSets

NoviSets are compact, hands-on activity kits co-designed with clinical psychologists to help children in war and crisis find their “green zone”, a state of calm, focus, and connection. Built on the same trusted science as our earlier trauma-care work, NoviSets are an entirely new card-based game created for simplicity and mobility. They can be used anywhere, even in bomb shelters or on the move. Every NoviSet placed in a child’s hands carries the compassion of those who stand with us, the belief that healing is possible, even when the world seems to fall apart.

The Problem

468 million children live in war zones. Chronic toxic stress disrupts brain development, learning, and health.

Few practical, scalable programs exist to help children calm their nervous systems in the middle of crisis.

The NoviSets Solution

A small backpack filled with simple, powerful tools and a child friendly guide. Through short activities: movement, breath, fine motor focus, and positive social play—children can reduce stress and build coping skills.

“We watch children move from red or blue, agitated or shut down, back to green: balanced, present, able to learn and connect.”

What’s Inside

- Red & Blue activity cards
- The toys needed to do the games and activities on the activity cards
- Hand sanitizer

How It Works (2–3 steps)

1. **Self check:** child identifies their state, Red, Blue, or Green.
2. **Pick a matching card** (Red = higher energy; Blue = calming) and do a 1–3 minute activity.
3. **Check again.** Repeat until more children reach **Green**.

Why It Works

Activities are intentionally chosen to activate the parasympathetic nervous system and down shift stress hormones:

Movement → releases endorphins; eases muscle tension.
Breath → stimulates the vagus nerve (e.g., square breathing).
Fine motor focus → redirects attention from stress triggers.
Social play → co regulation; boosts oxytocin and serotonin.

Where It’s Used

Classrooms, community centers, shelters, and safe spaces. Anywhere children gather in high stress settings. NoviSets are designed for small groups (1–5), with simple

steps caregivers and teachers can lead.

Origin

Conceived in a Lviv bomb shelter, when children’s stress reactions were mistaken for misbehavior. NoviSets translate clinical insight into practical play that works in the field.

What Your Support Does

- Equips children with immediate tools to calm and cope
- Enables caregivers/teachers with a simple, proven routine
- Scales easily: low cost, non digital,
- culturally adaptable.

Your gift helps put a NoviSet into the hands of a child who needs calm today—to learn, to connect, to hope.

Live Love.

Novi: helping children find their green zone.



Meet the team

At Novi, we do serious work, helping people, changing lives, and keeping hope alive. But we also laugh a lot. Here's a glimpse into the beautiful chaos that is our team.



Ira — The Organizer of People, Things, and Chaos

From: Kyiv, Ukraine

Ira is the one who keeps Novi running like a well-oiled (and occasionally squeaky) machine. She sources and assembles NoviSets, runs our Ukraine social media, and makes sure our visits to Ukraine come with both hospitality and home-cooked meals. She's also the unofficial housekeeper for every Novi team member passing through Kyiv.

When she's not organizing our work (or our lives), Ira is feeding everyone, beautifying her house, and trying to understand why anyone would run without being chased.

Passion: Making the world beautiful, ensuring no one leaves her home hungry, and keeping Sasha out of trouble (sometimes successfully).

Family: Married to Sasha, mother of Jordan and Mark.



Sasha — The Man with the Plan (and the Soap Bubbles)

From: Kyiv, Ukraine

Sasha leads Novi Ukraine with boundless energy and optimism. He's got ideas for everything, and sometimes even implements them. When he's not leading, he's playing with children, blowing bubbles, and pretending it's all for their sake (we're not so sure).

No problem is too big, no story too long, and no joke too ill-timed. He believes laughter solves most things.

Passion: Talking, storytelling, and finding the perfect joke for every occasion.

Motto: "No problem is too big."

Family: Husband to Ira, father of Mark and Jordan.



Luda — The Heart of Novi

From: Donetsk, Ukraine (fled to Kyiv when Russia invaded)

If Novi had a soul, it would be Luda. She collects stories, facts, and photos from our partners—and hearts along the way. She hugs when hugs are needed, cries with those who cry, and listens when words fall short. Sasha and Ira's sidekick and cheerleader, she brings warmth and laughter everywhere she goes.

Passion: Making people laugh, lifting others up, cooking, creating, and proving she can do what once seemed impossible.

Family: Married to Andrii, mom to Sonia.



Preston — The Tech Whisperer

From: the USA, living in Kyiv

If it has buttons, cables, or spreadsheets, Preston's your man. He keeps Novi's digital world spinning, reports, data, partner updates, and the occasional "Hey Sasha, please fix this." He's known for his appetite (for food and knowledge), his relentless curiosity, and his heroic attempts to speak Ukrainian. But do not, under any circumstance, take him to a pink restaurant.

Passion: Training, learning, explaining, and figuring things out.

Weakness: The color pink.





Hans — The Sage of Cheese and Law

From: Norway

Hans is our legal anchor and donor-whisperer, keeping Novi legitimate and loved in Norway. When he's not saving us from bureaucratic doom, he's dispensing life advice, usually while pairing it with a good wine or a rare cheese. He knows a little about everything (and a lot about cheese) and delights in sharing it with others.

Passion: Wine, cheese, reading, and solving the unsolvable.

Family: Married to Hanne, father of Vilde, Arvid and Vebjørn.



Jon — The Acrobat with a Spreadsheet

From: the USA

Jon handles everything administrative and financial, and somehow does it with grace, charm, and a contagious laugh. When he's not keeping our numbers straight, he's traveling with Steve, winning hearts, and occasionally serenading donors.

He believes the world would be better with more acro yoga, more sauce, and more climbing (though not of skyscrapers, please).

Passion: Acro yoga, music, breathing, and adventures that make others nervous.



Oddny — The Unofficial Everything Officer

From: Norway

Founder of Novi and wearer of many hats. She writes, speaks, fundraises, travels, and strategizes. Oh, and she invites people to her house and cooks for them whenever she is home long enough. When she's not trying to fix the world, she's running, doing yoga, or reading an actual newspaper (yes, made of paper).

Passion: Convincing the world to care more, feeding people, and staying curious.

Family: Married to Steve, mother of Elise, Naomi, and Kristin, and foster mom to Floyd, the goldendoodle.



Steve — The Visionary (and Joyful Fundraiser)

From: the USA, living in Norway

As CEO of Novi, Steve loves leading our growing team, building community, and does a lot of what many of us avoid, mostly involving money. He spends his days thinking about it, asking for it, and reminding everyone it's "for the children." When he's not changing the world, he's painting, sculpting, or breathing deeply (sometimes all three at once).

Passion: The children of the world, art, and books.

Family: Married to Oddny, father of Elise, Naomi, Kristin and devoted dog-dad to Floyd.



Staff retreat 2025. Making collages illustrating who we are. Spoiler alert: Not ordinary.

Ukrainian delicacies

Luda and Ira's world famous Syrnyky (cottage cheese pancakes)



Ingredients:

300 g cottage cheese (1 1/3 cup)
2 tbsp semolina or flour
1–2 tbsp sugar
1 egg
a pinch of salt
vanilla sugar — optional
some flour for shaping

Preparation:

1. In a bowl, combine the cottage cheese, egg, sugar, salt, semolina (or flour), and vanilla sugar. Mash everything with a fork or blend until smooth.
2. Let it rest. Leave the mixture for 15 minutes to let the semolina or flour absorb moisture — this helps the pancakes hold their shape.
3. Shape the syrnyky.
Option 1: Roll the dough into a log and cut it into small round pieces.
Option 2: Scoop about 50–70 g of dough with a spoon, place it on a floured surface, and shape it into a neat round using a glass in circular motions.
4. Heat a little oil in a frying pan.
Fry the syrnyky over medium heat on both sides until golden brown.

Serve with sour cream, jam, or honey. They are delicious warm or cold.

NEWS FLASH



Twelve thousand four hundred runners showed up in Kyiv this October, and tucked somewhere among the gazelles and superheroes were four members of the Novi team. None of us exactly born for speed.

We ran the half-marathon with the grace of determined furniture being pushed uphill, and at least two of us crossed the finish line looking like we were negotiating with the afterlife. But not one of us gave up, which, as far as we're concerned, is the only real metric that matters.

We ran for the joy of it, for the beauty of Kyiv, and to raise money and awareness for Ukraine and our projects. And truly, the best part? Our cheer squad. The Novi teammates who didn't run screamed like we were winning Olympic gold, rather than simply not collapsing. They were so inspired by our dramatic, near-death facial expressions that they're planning to run next year, too. That's our team: slightly unhinged, endlessly hopeful, and all heart.

Want to join us next year? Lace up your shoes and come!



This fall, Novi had the pleasure of hosting two concerts in Texas, in Horseshoe Bay and in Midland. We were fortunate to welcome artists with impressive résumés: Peter Mayer (who has shared stages with Jimmy Buffett, James Taylor, and Paul McCartney), along with Brendan Mayer and Brandon Alan. Together, they created nights of music that moved hearts.

These concerts came to life almost entirely through the hands and hearts of volunteers. They placed chairs, welcomed artists into their homes, spread the word, greeted guests, and ensured every note had a purpose.

This is our experience: when good people gather to do something meaningful, good things happen. There were laughs, late-night planning sessions, last-minute “do we have enough chairs?” moments, and a whole lot of joy. We raised awareness and support for the children Novi serves, but we also strengthened the bonds between us.

Music may bring us together, but community keeps us there.

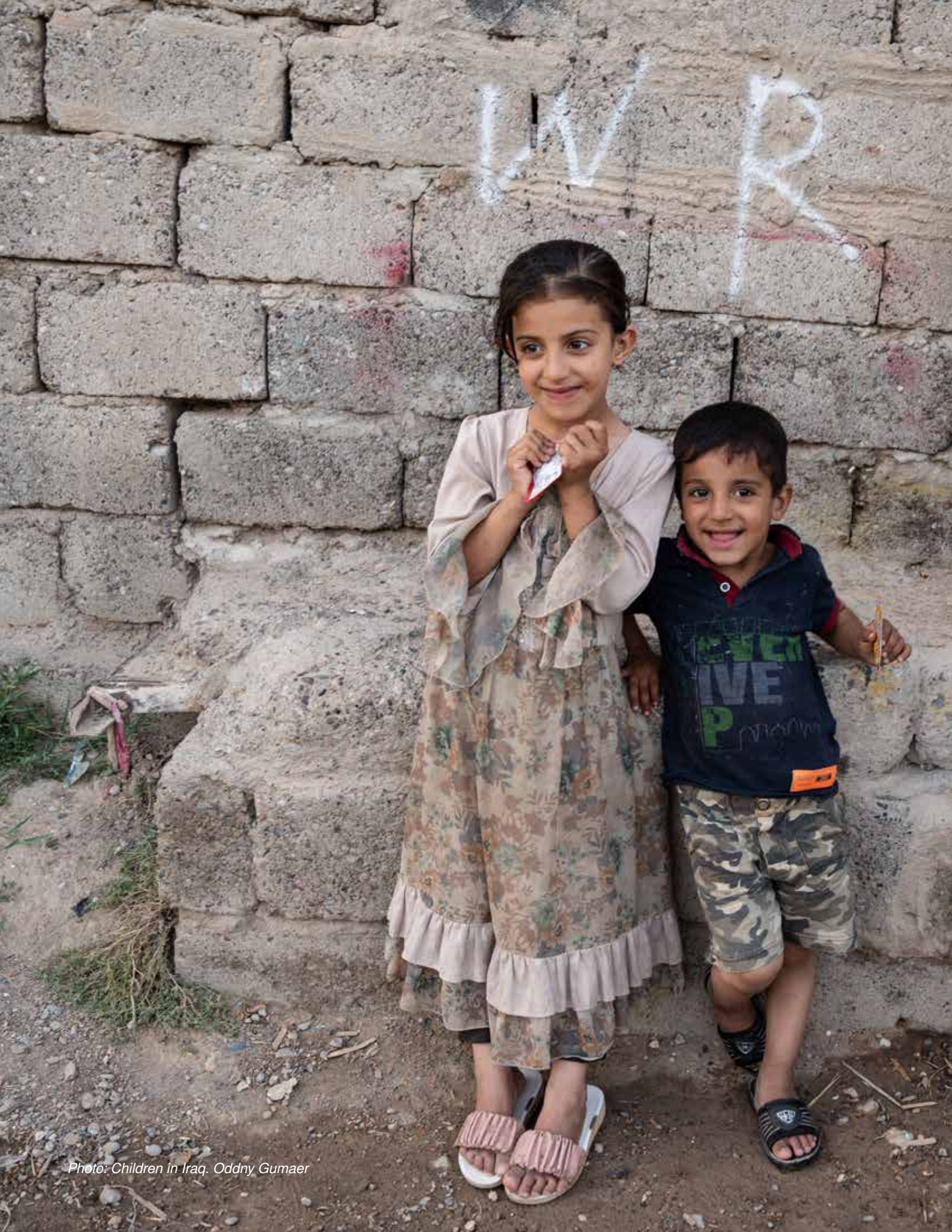


Photo: Children in Iraq. Oddny Gumaer

Do Justice. Love Mercy. Walk Humbly.

A verse from the prophet Micah has shaped our work from the beginning:
Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly.

You won't often see Bible verses printed in our publications. Not because it isn't central to who we are, but because quoting them will often close the very door we hope to open. When people of other faiths or no faith at all see church language, they tend to assume we've come to convert them. They often stop listening before seeing what love looks like in action.

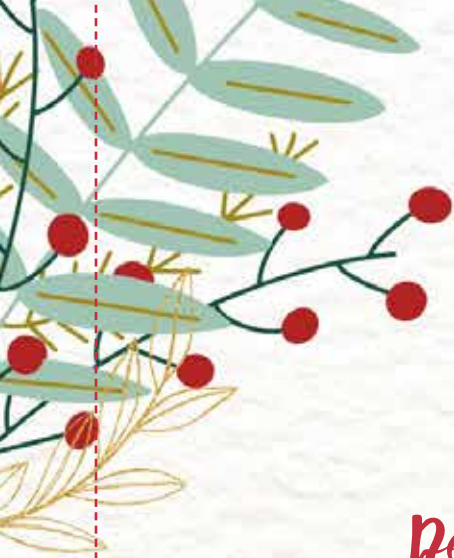
We go to places torn by war because love calls us there, to heal, feed the hungry, listen, and stand alongside families during crisis. Our presence is meant to say: we're in this together; you're worth showing up for.

The love we've found restores and redeems. It doesn't come with conditions. It gives even when there's nothing to gain. That's what we mean by acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly, as Jesus does. That's also why we came up with the tagline *Live Love*, because love is something we do, not just something we say.

At Novi, we believe love speaks loudest when it's lived and embodied. Justice lived tenaciously. Mercy given freely. Humility practiced daily. This is what faith looks like in action.

Steve Gumaer, CEO and founder of Novi





Dear.....

I was going to get you something shiny, fluffy, or maybe even a bit weird, but then I thought, you've probably got enough of those already.

So instead, I've given a box of food to a family in Ukraine, in your honor.

They'll have a meal to share this Christmas, and I hope that thought makes you smile.

***No One Should Be Hungry
at Christmas***

You may want to check out the organization I gave the donation to. They are called the Novi Community and work with children in war zones. Read about them them at [**novi.ngo**](https://novi.ngo)



From your friend

.....





**“If you are neutral in
situations of injustice,
you have chosen the side of
the oppressor.”**

Desmond Tutu

novi.ngo

